

CHAPTER 4: VILLAGE CHARACTER AND HOUSING

Population centers have been a focus of development from pre-history until around 1950 when, in the U.S., affluence and the automobile led to suburban development. The integration of land uses with stores, work and residences within walking distance or clustered around transportation nodes was no longer necessary. This has come at some social cost in terms of changing the character of communities and forcing people into automobiles to take care of basic convenience needs. Population centers are either vibrant or stagnant. It is the goal of this committee to establish a framework that will allow East Acton Village to be vibrant for the benefit of those living in the surrounding areas.

Results from surveys taken two years ago of Acton residents indicate that to attract people to East Acton Village there would need to be an improvement in “aesthetics” (the look of the area), an increase in the landscaping, and additional open space and parks. East Acton Village now consists of a busy vehicular artery with strip malls on each side. In order to create the atmosphere of an attractive and active village, which is the goal, incentives are required so that when redevelopment occurs, it will be compatible with the village environment envisioned by residents.

An important first step in attaining these goals is to make East Acton Village pedestrian friendly. Crossing Great Road is dangerous now and accommodations must be made for crossing the highway for pedestrians and bicyclists. Sidewalks and walkways connecting village destinations must be improved to allow the greatest possible number of surrounding residents to come without cars, and to be able to shop and return in the safest manner possible. Once in the village, people need to have spaces to sit and relax; enjoy food and beverages; watch other people; meet friends, neighbors, and colleagues; and find respite from traffic and work in open, green spaces.

A critical mass is required. In order to encourage pedestrians to come, a variety of businesses is necessary to meet their needs. At the same time, businesses require a sufficient customer base to remain viable. Businesses need signs that allow them to adequately inform passing motorists and pedestrians of their presence. They also need enough people living and working in the area to provide a steady stream of clients and customers. Also, by providing unique events, businesses can draw outside of the commuting and residential area to increase business opportunities. The village needs to provide space for these activities.

Acton is in line for continuing development as businesses and residents move out of the Greater Boston area and westward towards Route 495. In order to preserve what little remaining open, green space is still available in East Acton, it must be maintained wherever possible. As one enters East Acton on Route 2A from the rotary there is an area of land off Wetherbee Street that provides a rural backdrop for this community. This property has tree-covered hills and open space within walking distance of the

village center and is surrounded by town conservation land with a potential rail trail. While property development is up to the landowner, the community would like to see as much of the open space surrounding EAV preserved as possible. Coming from the west along Route 2A into East Acton Village, the EAV Planning Committee has recommended the establishment of a village green near the location of the old train depot and Ice House Pond. This area, on the corner of Great Road and Concord Road, provides another opportunity to preserve open, green space for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike.

East Acton contains many historical structures dating from the turn of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The Nashoba Tavern at the corner of Wetherbee Street and Route 2A was built at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the Wetherbee Tavern (currently Phillips Glass et.al.) dates from the early nineteenth century. Bursaw Gas and Oil was first built in the 1920's. Many of the single-family homes along Route 2A are from these same time periods. These buildings are an important part of the fabric of East Acton Village and should be preserved or redeveloped in such a way that the basic architecture remains. New construction or reconstruction in the area could also be designed to more appropriately reflect the architecture of this time period.

Goal V1: Reinforce community by creating a sustainable, memorable, shared experience connecting the full spectrum of the local population.

This goal can be elaborated by further defining the terms used:

- **Community:** home, work, commerce, cultural and social fabric, support systems, and other elements of the human environment, which are created and used by the local population. Enhances citizenship, achievement, ethics, and public safety and mitigates alienation and intolerance.
- **Sustainable:** capable of inexhaustibly (socially, financially, environmentally, etc.) furthering all aspects of this goal while adapting to the changing needs and makeup of this community.
- **Memorable:** a unique place arising from a unique combination of circumstances, (i.e., the cultural, social, commercial, and other entities) and relationships, and their supporting environment that have accrued over time in response to the needs of this community.
- **Shared:** communally, rather than individually, experienced. Public occurrences in public places where the full spectrum of this local populace and visitors can interact
- **Connecting the full spectrum:** accessible such that all participants - children, elderly, handicapped, singles, families, lower income, etc. - can independently take part in their daily activities and make the resulting social and business connections.
- **Local population:** Only a village responds most intimately and holistically to these needs of the nearest workers and residents. From the full spectrum of the local working and living population come the constituents of this community.

A successful center provides for the daily needs of its primary constituents, the population that pursues its daily activities in and around the East Acton Village area. These activities may include residing, working, studying, worshiping, governing, relaxing and playing, buying things, sending packages, using services, socializing, eating out, etc. For a village-sized center these are, to a large degree, satisfied by smaller shops and businesses primarily serving the local community. The above characteristics (see bullet points) are the timeless qualities of a successful village-sized center. This goal seeks to revive these factors through attracting needed providers and resources and helping them to prosper, and through strengthening positive qualities in the built environment.

East Acton Village (EAV) can be significantly more successful in fulfilling the role of a village serving the local community. Few of the characteristics bulleted above presently exist in any planned way in EAV. The existing design and location of buildings, structures, roads, etc. (the “built environment”) in EAV do not effectively support and respond to the needs of the local population or create a community feeling. In order to

implement this vision, the EAV Planning Committee recommends the following objectives and strategies.

Objective 1: Enhance diversity of uses and users in a socially and economically sustainable manner.

Objective 2: Integrate commercial, recreational, civic life around a community focal point.

Objective 3: Enhance and promote a sense of “connectedness” between indoors and outdoors (i.e., the structure and its lot); among multiple structures /lots within the village; and between the village center and its surroundings.

Issues

All parcels in East Acton Village are developed to some degree at this time. Therefore, the process to create smart growth and to recreate village character will take time. Recommendations within this plan are long-term but contain incentives to try to expedite the changes.

While most of the village is currently surrounded by residential area, there are two areas that are now zoned Limited Business and Small Manufacturing. In order to protect the village from encroachment by non-village type business, the plan includes rezoning of these two areas to more compatible business uses.

Recommendations

Zoning and business incentives, design guidelines, and other public sector initiatives are the most effective ways to encourage the appropriate development of the built environment and the cultural, social, and commercial relationships that would achieve this goal. The strategies proposed are all meant to achieve a “distinct village” concept for East Acton Village. The vision is of a vibrant business area with sufficient population to support the local businesses and business diversity to support the needs of the local residents. Included should be areas for townspeople to gather to meet, eat, rest and shop. Bringing town services (such as a mini-postal center, voter registration options, tax bill payment) as well as businesses to the village adds diversity. Social events, such as music festivals, food fairs, fund-raisers, attract more than local residents and bring potential customers to the area. With nearby water and trails available, advertising these opportunities will also bring customers as well as town residents to the East Acton Village area.

The EAV Planning Committee recommends amending the Table of Principal Uses to provide for additional job creating office businesses in and around EAV. Small educational/instructional services, commercial entertainment, and small scientific enterprises (requiring special permits) would enhance job potential. Nursing homes, trade shops, gas stations are business types that no longer provide the type of community business or jobs conducive to a pedestrian scale village. Business sizes will be limited under the allowed Maximum Floor Area chart in the Zoning Bylaw to

discourage the large, regional businesses that create traffic problems and change the ambiance of the village.

Villages require a level of residences near or around them in order to become and remain viable. Acton is concerned about the lack of affordable housing in the community. By providing for additional affordable dwelling units within or near the village the housing issues can be addressed and it allows for more shoppers to keep the area vibrant during non-business hours. While the thrust of the intent is to make the village a vibrant business center, a variety of residential units is also needed. The proximity of four large apartment complexes currently provides a minimum population density.

The importance of preserving the historic components of the village area is paramount. The structures built during the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth century will be used as the basis for the redevelopment process. These structures and the East Acton Village Green will become integrated parts of the recreated village. Also, these buildings set off East Acton Village from the current strip mall/mini-mall businesses and apartment complexes that have come to represent the rest of the Route 2A corridor. Sidewalks, interconnecting walkways and paths leading to and from surrounding residential areas, walk up food windows, plazas with fountains and compact parks will add to the character of EAV. They will also encourage people to leave their cars, making the area more pedestrian friendly and hopefully reducing traffic. Compact, historic, with business variety, easy access for customers and green space is all part of the vision for East Acton Village.

The factors that will achieve these goals will be implemented with the following strategies.

Recommended Strategies for Village Character and Housing Goal V1

Strategy Number	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V1.1a *	Amend Table of Principal Uses in Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to allow appropriately scaled recreational, educational, commercial entertainment, scientific and additional business types and eliminate the use of gas stations, nursing homes and trade shops.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Moderate, 1 year	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V1.1b	Establish an informal organization (EAVO) consisting of local residents, business owners, and property owners to monitor and promote the Goals and Objectives of the EAV Plan.	High			Moderate, 2 months	Spring 2004	EAVPC, Local Businesses, Property Owners
V1.1c	Encourage campaigns to increase recognition, patronage, and community involvement of village businesses.	Low			Moderate, 1 year, ongoing	Ongoing	EAVO
V1.1d	Produce an EAV business directory.	Low			Moderate, 1 year	2006	EAVO
V1.1e	Establish cultural and public service presence in the village.	Medium		BOS	Major, 1 year	2006, ongoing	Town, EAVO
V1.2a *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to include "Special Provisions for East Acton Village" design guidelines to help developers understand the vision for East Acton Village.	High	Special Provisions for EAV	PB, BOS, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V1.2b	Establish, construct and continually enhance the East Acton Village Green.	High	EAV Green Concept Plan	BOS	Major, 2 years	2004, ongoing	Highway, Municipal Properties, volunteers

Recommended Strategies for Village Character and Housing Goal V1 (cont'd)

Strategy Number	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V1.2c	Construct the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT).	High	BFRT feasibility study	BOS	Major, 5 years	2008	Natural Resources, BFRT Committee
V1.2d *	Amend Dimensional Requirements for the EAV Zoning District to decrease minimum set backs.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, BOS, TM	Minor, 1 week	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V1.3a *	Amend Dimensional Requirements for the EAV Zoning District to decrease minimum set backs.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, BOS, TM	Minor, 1 week	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V1.3b	Augment existing sidewalk network.	Medium	Transportation and Infrastructure section	BOS	Major, 2-3 years	Ongoing	Highway, MassHighway, Property Owners
V1.3c *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to include "Special Provisions for East Acton Village" design guidelines to help developers understand the vision for East Acton Village.	High	Special Provisions for EAV	PB, BOS, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB

Implementation

Create an organization of volunteers made up of residents, business owners, property owners and other interested parties which would act in a supporting role for the business and residential community. It would be called the East Acton Village Organization (EAVO). Some of the tasks recommended include:

- Establish a campaign to increase recognition, patronage, and community involvement of village businesses through incentives such as preferred town vendor classification, and/or public relations (marketing, community events, sponsorship of sports or other community activities, etc.).
- Create a business directory with descriptions of types of services, products, et al to be displayed at EAV businesses, distributed to residents, put in the local newspapers, etc.
- Establish cultural and public service presence in the village through, for some examples, local municipal office hours, installation of satellite library branches, or relocation of town/public facilities (e.g., performance space, branch library, Town Clerk's desk, mailboxes, meeting/function rooms, elected official's office), possibly ranging from mobile carts/booths to small leased or donated indoor or outdoor spaces or larger.
- Conduct a "Learn about your Town" event each fall in the village with each Town department and committee represented to talk to residents.
- Create foot/bike paths to and between surrounding neighborhoods and to close and useful destinations such as the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) and Brookside Mall.
- Explore public-private funding opportunities when necessary.
- Coordinate with other town bodies to encourage the use of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR's)
- Periodically review the TDR process and make recommendations for change to guarantee that TDR's are having the desired effect

Using A Pattern Language (Oxford University Press, 1977) by Alexander, Ishikawa, Silverstein, et al as the basis for making East Acton Village more successful in fulfilling the role of village center for its constituents, strategies were chosen from the several patterns proposed by these authors. The ones delineated in objectives two and three deal with those issues thought to be most important as they relate to East Acton Village. Objective 2 relates to activity focal points in order to integrate recreational and other activities within the village. Objective 3 solutions come from the suggestion by the authors to enhance the connection between and among focal points with public corridors. "The Special Provisions Design Guidelines" for EAV integrate these solutions.

Goal V2: Preserve East Acton Village's historic, cultural and recreational resources.

Objective 1: Research and locate historical buildings and structures in order to preserve them.

Objective 2: Encourage the preservation, maintenance, and restoration of historically or architecturally significant structures and places.

Objective 3: Support cultural and recreational events, places and opportunities.

Objective 4: Encourage restoration/preservation of existing common spaces and public lands for shared community experiences.

Issues

Preservation and fostering that which sets the East Acton Village area apart from the more “strip like” development along the rest of Route 2A in Acton is a primary issue. East Acton Village contains some structures and places that reflect the history and development of the village. These structures and places add character to the village, but they are threatened because Route 2A is a major commuter route and there is pressure to develop “strip like” retail centers along the roadway.

A village is more than a physical setting; it is a community of people, businesses and visitors. Areas are required for getting people together for community based activities. These areas can be formal or informal / public or private. Activities may range from passive recreation (spaces to sit and read) to formal events (seasonal fair or musicians). They can be publicly or privately owned. According to the surveys done in 2001, more of these areas are needed in East Acton Village.

Recommendations

Before preservation can occur the Town and townspeople need to know which buildings and structures are historical. While the Town has added a number of East Acton Village buildings to its Cultural Resource List, there is still a lot of information that is not readily available on the structures in this area. The state historical organization provides forms to help communities determine the historical significance of structures within its borders. The Acton Historical Commission and proposed EAV Organization are urged to take the time to research the East Acton Village area to determine significant structures, landmarks, physical sites et al. Once this information is available, then preserving these building, landmarks, sites et al will be easier and noting their history will be helpful to all Acton residents.

Once this information is available preservation incentives can be created to encourage property owners to maintain and preserve these structures and features. The new Community Preservation Act could provide funding for some of these projects if owners apply and are accepted for funding by the Community Preservation Committee.

Recommended Strategies for Village Character and Housing Goal V2

Strategy Number	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V2.1a	Using the appropriate form from the MA Historical Commission, list those buildings, unique physical sites, landmarks, archeological sites, etc that distinguishes East Acton Village.	High		Acton Historical Commission	Major, 2-4 years	2007	Acton Historical Commission
V2.1b	Complete MA Historical Commission's forms for individual buildings within the East Acton Village area.	High		Acton Historical Commission	Major, 4 years	2007	EAVO, Acton Historical Commission
V2.2a *	Amend the Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to encourage the preservation of EAV structures on the Town Cultural Resource List.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Moderate, 1 year	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V2.2b *	Amend the Zoning Bylaw to provide FAR, parking, or signage incentives for the EAV Zoning District for the renovation of historic structures which reestablish approximate original facades to Acton Historical Commission standards. New structures with complementary architecture could be constructed on the same site through increased FAR where appropriate from the density options menu.	Medium	Special Provisions for EAV	PB, BOS, TM and later PB, BOS and Acton Historical Commission	Moderate, 2 months and ongoing	Spring 2004, ongoing	EAVPC, PB, BOS, Property Owners, Developers
V2.2c	Compile a written history of East Acton Village.	Medium			Moderate, 1 year	2008	EAVO, Acton Historical Commission

Recommended Strategies for Village Character and Housing Goal V2 (cont'd)

Strategy Number	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V2.3a	Establish an informal organization (EAVO) consisting of local residents, business owners, and property owners to monitor and promote the Goals and Objectives of the EAV Plan.	High			Moderate, 2 months	Spring 2004	EAVPC, Local Businesses, Property Owners
V2.4a*	Amend the Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to encourage the development and/or preservation of common spaces by providing incentives for them.	High	Special Provisions for EAV	BOS, TM	Moderate, 1 year	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V2.4b	Construct the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT).	High	BFRT Plan	BOS	Major, 2 years	2006	Natural Resources, BFRT Committee, State
V2.4c	Establish, construct and continually enhance the East Acton Village Green.	High	EAV Green Concept Plan	BOS	Major, 2 years	2004, ongoing	Highway, Municipal Properties, volunteers

Implementation

Encourage preservation

There are many buildings within East Acton Village District that are on the Town's "Cultural Resource List." These are the homes that should be preserved and, as others are added, they should be preserved as well. Working with the Acton Historical Commission to complete the area forms and the individual building forms will bring attention to the number and quality of historical sites in East Acton Village. This may also result in an expanded Cultural Resource List and encourage current owners to restore their properties. In addition, it could encourage developers of larger sites or assemblages to preserve "historic" buildings.

Providing incentives to maintain and/or improve historical sites and structures would help with preservation. Redevelopment of lots where historic structures are preserved would be rewarded by an additional 0.10 FAR. For those owners who destroy historic structures, development on those lots would be restricted to a maximum of 0.20 FAR.

Once this work is done the volunteer committee from East Acton Village should put together a history of the area both to encourage preservation and to encourage maintenance of the village characteristics found in the history.

Historical area survey

Completing this inventory will allow the community to pinpoint more specifically what should be maintained or improved in the village so that the most important physical aspects are addressed. This includes not only the buildings but unique historical sites (the location of the train depot and other outbuildings within the East Acton Village Green; the site of the old ice house; the railroad tracks from the two original lines that ran through the area; gristmill wheels from the mills; etc) and physical examples such as the canal that used to run the mills.

Individual building surveys

The cultural history represented by a typical village is worthy of protection. Historic and architectural resources are often the best evidence of that heritage. In addition to providing cultural and educational benefits, these assets can also enhance property values, increase local pride and bolster economic development. Without the knowledge of which houses are worthy of protection, there is the chance that some very important architectural resources will be lost.

Once the area survey is complete or as part of that process, each structure in the Village should have a form with information as to construction date, design style, any history that's known, outbuildings (barns, carriage houses), etc. This is

important in making sure that owners are aware of the history of the building so that they can take special care of those characteristic features.

Informal organization

Town Hall or the Chamber of Commerce can provide a contact list of local businesses. The EAVO must include local residents as well as business owners as they both have a vested interest in the success of the village.

Incentives for common space

Public outdoor courtyards or gathering areas can be costly to build and maintain. Areas such as the newly redesigned Colonial Spirits Plaza should be encouraged by providing incentives for their development.

Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) and East Acton Village Green

The committee charged with implementing the rail trail will consider many options for funding. For the development of the East Acton Village Green, the EAVPC is seeking funding from the Community Preservation Act and the local businesses.

Goal V3: Create a defining identity for East Acton Village that enhances the appearance and better distinguishes East Acton Village from the rest of the Great Road corridor.

Objective 1: Establish a system of consistent design elements to delineate the village area and enhance village aesthetics.

Objective 2: Ensure that land uses and densities allowed, along with the dimensional requirements for buildings, parking lots, and other structures, create a village ambiance and promote the village as an activity center.

Objective 3: Encourage private or volunteer efforts to improve community identification, to create a sense of place and pride.

Objective 4: Promote a community focus and awareness within and around the village.

Objective 5: Encourage the on-going maintenance and repair of buildings, structures, and properties within the village.

Objective 6: Encourage façade and signage improvements.

Issues

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns Route 2A (Great Road in Acton) and controls the speed limit and all improvements on or along the roadway that Acton, as a community, might wish to make (e.g., traffic management controls, driveway curb cuts, etc.). Traffic on Great Road is a major impediment cutting off pedestrian/ bicyclist access to the village shops across the road. The speed limit (40 mph) is too high for safe passage from one side to the other and prohibits (according to general state guidelines) the use of crosswalks.

The Nashoba Brook flows through the Village on the southern side of Great Road. Environmental concerns and regulations limit the development or redevelopment of lots on that side of the roadway and makes compliance with set back, parking and waste water system design requirements difficult.

During the late 1800s and up to the 1930's and 1940's East Acton Village was a center of commerce with a tavern, restaurant, ice cutting business and mills along or near Nashoba Brook. Many of these destinations and trade businesses that were the core of the village are now gone. With the increase of traffic along Great Road over the years and with the change in business types, the village has lost its identity and also has been divided by traffic. Businesses tend to cater more toward drive-by traffic rather than serve as a destination for residents and visitors. One goal for the East Acton Village Plan is to recreate that sense of village.

Zoning and business incentives with design and historical preservation guidelines are the most feasible and effective ways to encourage business and residential owners to

make the necessary changes to achieve the goal of village identity. By integrating a variety of land uses and open space within the Village District, a defining character can be preserved that separates East Acton Village from the rest of the Great Road corridor. By giving incentives to village businesses to expand, a wider variety of shops can be promoted, more pedestrian friendly amenities can be added, and, as a result, a more attractive place to live and do business will be created.

The current clutter of signs along Great Road is very distracting; it does not enhance the sense of village; nor is it easy for customers or potential customers to locate businesses. In order to facilitate the village ambiance, some uniformity is recommended while preserving each business's right for a unique identification. Since it is not the purview of the EAV Planning Committee to change the sign bylaws, the Committee urges the Town to establish a process to review and amend the signage requirements.

Other ideas considered

While structured parking is currently allowed in East Acton Village, it would not help create a sense of village. The zoning bylaw should be amended to disallow structured parking within the EAV Zoning District.

On-street parking is recommended in the future and discussed in the Transportation and Infrastructure section.

Recommendations

Creating a compact, viable village center from strip mall development is a challenging task. The objectives and strategies recommended are the incentives and tools that are necessary to encourage current and future property owners to make the changes necessary to create the desired ambiance sought.

The recommendations for property zoning changes are based on the need to create a compact village center and to maintain open space within the village environment. While the properties on Wetherbee Street beyond the railroad bed were discussed, there was no consensus on recommendations that were appropriate to change the current zoning. The goal of the Master Plan to concentrate business development in village centers might be undermined were the lots on Wetherbee rezoned to include retail and/or business at this time. This issue was discussed at length with some recommending a change along the Wetherbee Street saving the rear parcels for residential or open space. Rezoning to allow for only office park and senior housing did not achieve consensus. Some felt that, while it was a good idea, it might be too limited in scope and might be a detriment to the neighborhood and the conservation land abutting it along Route 2. The view of the heavily treed hill on the property on the westerly side of Wetherbee Street creates a wonderful, rural backdrop for EAV and should be maintained.

Recommended Strategies for Village Character and Housing Goal V3

Strategy Number	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V3.1a *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to include "Special Provisions for East Acton Village" design guidelines to help developers understand the vision for East Acton Village.	High	Special Provisions for EAV	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V3.1b *	Amend the "Maximum Floor Area of Businesses and Industries" Zoning Bylaw table for the EAV Zoning District to provide for a greater variety of business types and sizes.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V3.2a	Require landscaping for parking that will enhance the village environment.	High	See the Environment Section	BOS, TM	Major, 1 year, then ongoing	2005	Owners, Developers
V3.2b *	Amend the Zoning Bylaw to reduce the minimum open space requirement in the EAV Zoning District from 35% to 25%.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V3.2c	Increase tree plantings and other landscaping, encourage grounds maintenance, and encourage the development of green spaces throughout the village.	High		BOS, TM	Major, 2 years	2006	Property Owners, Developers, Highway, Tree Warden
V3.2d	Encourage underground utility lines.	Medium		Property Owners, Local Utilities, MassHighway	Major, 5-10 years	2014	Highway, MassHighway, Property Owners, Local Utilities, MassHighway

Recommended Strategies for Village Character and Housing Goal V3 (cont'd)

Strategy Number	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V3.2e	Install village entry signs at key points in East Acton Village along Great Road (Route 2A): near Keefe Road and at the EAV Green.	High		BOS, Highway	Moderate, 1 year	2004, 2007	Municipal Prop, Highway, Boy Scouts, Property Owners
V3.2f*	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to create a new EAV II Zoning District.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V3.2g*	Rezone tax map G5, parcel 69 (8 Wetherbee Street) to EAV.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V3.2h*	Rezone tax map G4, parcel 212 at corner of Concord Road and Great Road from LB to ARC.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V3.2i*	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to disallow structured parking in EAV District.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V3.2j*	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to reduce required parking within the EAV Village District to 70% of that presently required.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V3.2k*	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to reduce parking required within the EAV Village District to 50% of that presently required if shared parking is used and reduce the parking requirement in the new EAV II district to 70% of that presently required if shared parking is used.	Medium	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB

Recommended Strategies for Village Character and Housing Goal V3 (cont'd)

Strategy Number	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V3.3a	Encourage, through the volunteer organization (EAVO), activity in the Village through both public programs and private efforts (i.e., book fairs, concerts, sidewalk sales, exhibits and artists' corners).	Medium		By individual event group organizers	Moderate, ongoing	Ongoing	EAVO
V3.3b	Facilitate the joint effort of Town personnel and community volunteers to beautify East Acton Village.	High		BOS	Moderate, ongoing	Ongoing	EAVO
V3.4a	Encourage, through the volunteer organization (EAVO), activity in the Village through both public programs and private efforts (i.e., book fairs, concerts, sidewalk sales, exhibits and artists' corners).	Medium		By individual event group organizers	Moderate, ongoing	Ongoing	EAVO
V3.4b	Facilitate the joint effort of Town personnel and community volunteers to beautify East Acton Village.	High		BOS	Moderate, ongoing	Ongoing	EAVO
V3.4c	Establish, construct and continually enhance the East Acton Village Green.	Medium	EAV Green Concept Plan	BOS,	Major, 2 years	2004, ongoing	Municipal Properties, Highway, volunteers
V3.4d	Working with the Acton Historical Commission, establish the use of plaques that name buildings, famous sites or discuss historic events within the Village.	High		Acton Historical Commission, BOS	Major, 2 years	2004, ongoing	EAVO, Acton Historical Commission

Recommended Strategies for Village Character and Housing Goal V3 (cont'd)

Strategy Number	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V3.5a	Establish an informal organization (EAVO) consisting of local residents, business owners, and property owners to monitor and promote the Goals and Objectives of the EAV Plan.	High			Moderate, 2 months	Spring 2004	EAVPC, Local Businesses, Property Owners
V3.5b	Make the design guidelines to East Acton Village in the Zoning Bylaw available to property owners to help them understand the vision and guide them when maintaining/developing their properties.	High	Special Provisions for EAV		Minor, 1 month	2005	EAVO, Planning
V3.6a *	Amend sign bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to allow for exterior sign improvements and to provide a unifying feature to the village district.		Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Moderate, 1 year	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB

Implementation

Design guidelines

Incorporating guidelines into the Zoning Bylaw will codify the vision for the East Acton Village zoning district.

Business Sizes

To encourage a variety of businesses, and that are small enough to walk to and between, the East Acton Village Planning Committee recommends amending some of the maximum floor area limits currently in the Zoning Bylaw for EAV zoned businesses. The changes are highlighted below. Striked-through words are deletions and underlined words are additions.

Principal Use	Square Footage Allowed in the EAV Zoning District
<u>Commercial Education or Instruction</u>	<u>5,000</u>
Retail Store	5,000 <u>7,500</u>
Office	5,000 <u>7,500</u>
Health Care Facility	5,000
Restaurant	5,000
Lodge or Club	NR <u>5,000</u>
Veterinary Care	NR <u>5,000</u>
Services	5,000
Repair Shop, Technical Shop, Studio	5,000
Building Trade Shop	5,000
Commercial Recreation	NR <u>7,500</u>
Commercial Entertainment	NR <u>5,000</u>
Manufacturing	NR (no regulation – the use is not permitted)

Village aesthetics

Entrance signs: These would be simple ways to create identifiable boundaries for East Acton Village and to make it clear to motorists that they are entering a demarcated district. The use of entrance signs on both the east and west ends of the district will make it clear that this is a unique place on Great Road.

Historic structures

Small, historical buildings don't necessarily fit the modern business need. Therefore, the zoning bylaw land use section should be changed to allow for more business types within EAV that would fit into and onto the smaller buildings and properties. The intention is not to change all single-family

buildings into business property but to encourage the continued use of some of the current single-family homes to remain as such in order to populate the village.

Parking

The sight of continuous parking areas is aesthetically unpleasing and does not create the effect of a village center. Requiring parking behind or beside structures, brings the focus back to the people and businesses, increasing a sense of community. Where this is not possible, property owners are to be encouraged to mix trees, shrubs and other landscaping greenery beside and within the parking area. In order to encourage current or future property owners to join in creating this atmosphere, incentives such as reduced setback requirements and allowing shared parking will/should be provided and the use of design guidelines to encourage bicycle parking. If and when it becomes feasible, on-street parking should be allowed and encouraged.

Lighting

Lighting in the EAV Zoning District will be appropriate to village scale and character and abide by the new Acton Outdoor Lighting Bylaw in order to provide safety as well as a village unifying element. The EAVPC is also recommending gooseneck lighting for signs in the village (see strategy 6a). Lighting is also discussed in the Transportation and Infrastructure section so please refer to that section for further details.

Power lines

Overhead utility lines, not common during the earlier heyday of East Acton Village, detract from the landscaping and open areas of EAV. Placing utility lines underground is not a simple task. It would require working with all the utility companies (electric, telephone and cable), the State (if the lines are along Great Road), and the individual landowners during redevelopment to place utility lines underground. The appropriate Town Board would need to take the lead on this.

Scenic views and landscaping

Green spaces and proper landscaping will set the East Acton Village District apart from the rest of Great Road. The East Acton Village Green and Nashoba Brook enhance the beauty and attractiveness of East Acton Village to local residents and village patrons. Building on the “Acton Looks Good” campaign, local volunteers should work with the Acton Highway Department or Municipal Properties Department to maintain the EAV Green (mowing and pruning), the Concord Road island and other more

“islands of beauty” that may be created. The focus is on the quality of the open space in the village, not just quantity (also see Chapter 6, Goals 1 and 3).

Signage

The EAV Planning Committee recommends that the Town review the current Sign section of the Zoning Bylaw in order to update and improve the regulations to aid local businesses and patrons. The following changes to the Sign section of the Zoning Bylaw for East Acton Village are recommended:

1. Allow the use of full cut-off, gooseneck lamps for all external lighting of signs.
2. Allow for a maximum of three external signs per business from the following menu provided that there are no more than two signs on one side of the business:
 - a. One sign across the front entrance to the business (limitations as provided in the current Zoning Bylaw).
 - b. One awning sign either in the front or rear of the business that is lit externally with full cut-off lights or gooseneck lights if it meets the village ambiance criteria.
 - c. One projecting sign (limitations as provided in the current Zoning Bylaw).
 - d. One smaller wall sign (for secondary access to the business).
 - e. One free-standing sign (limitations as provided in the current Zoning Bylaw).
3. In addition to the current allowed material for signs in the village, add the use of wood or “wood appearance” signs. [As technology makes materials that are safer and from recycled materials, the EAV Planning Committee would like the Town to consider allowing these in signs as well.]

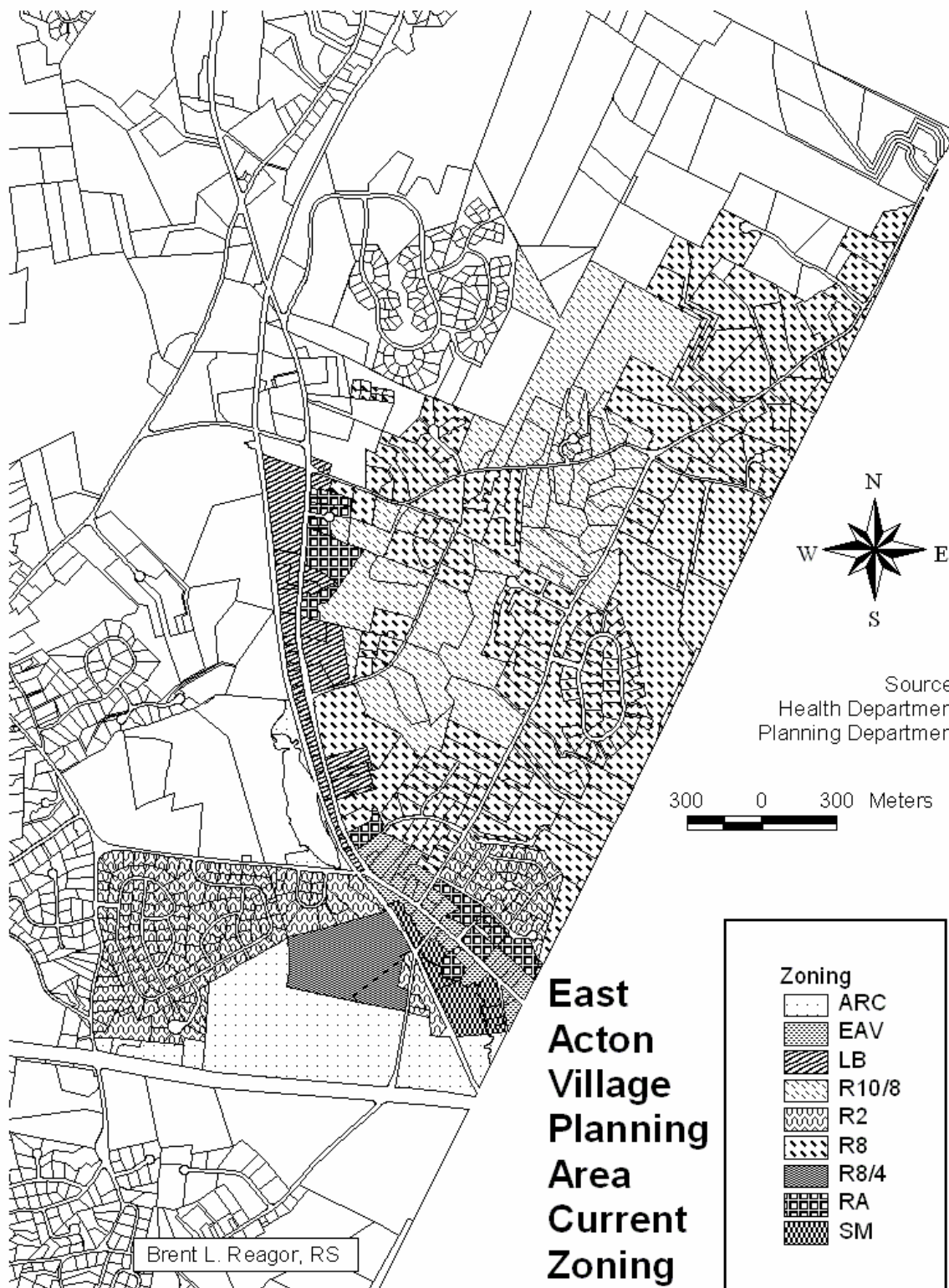
Zoning

The purpose of rezoning specific parcels to EAV is to create a viable, compact village area for shopping and gathering. The recommended rezoning of the one Small Manufacturing parcel (along with the parcel rezoned at the October, 2003 Special Town Meeting) will result in a village district area that is continuous and sufficiently large in area to promote the type of village atmosphere desired.

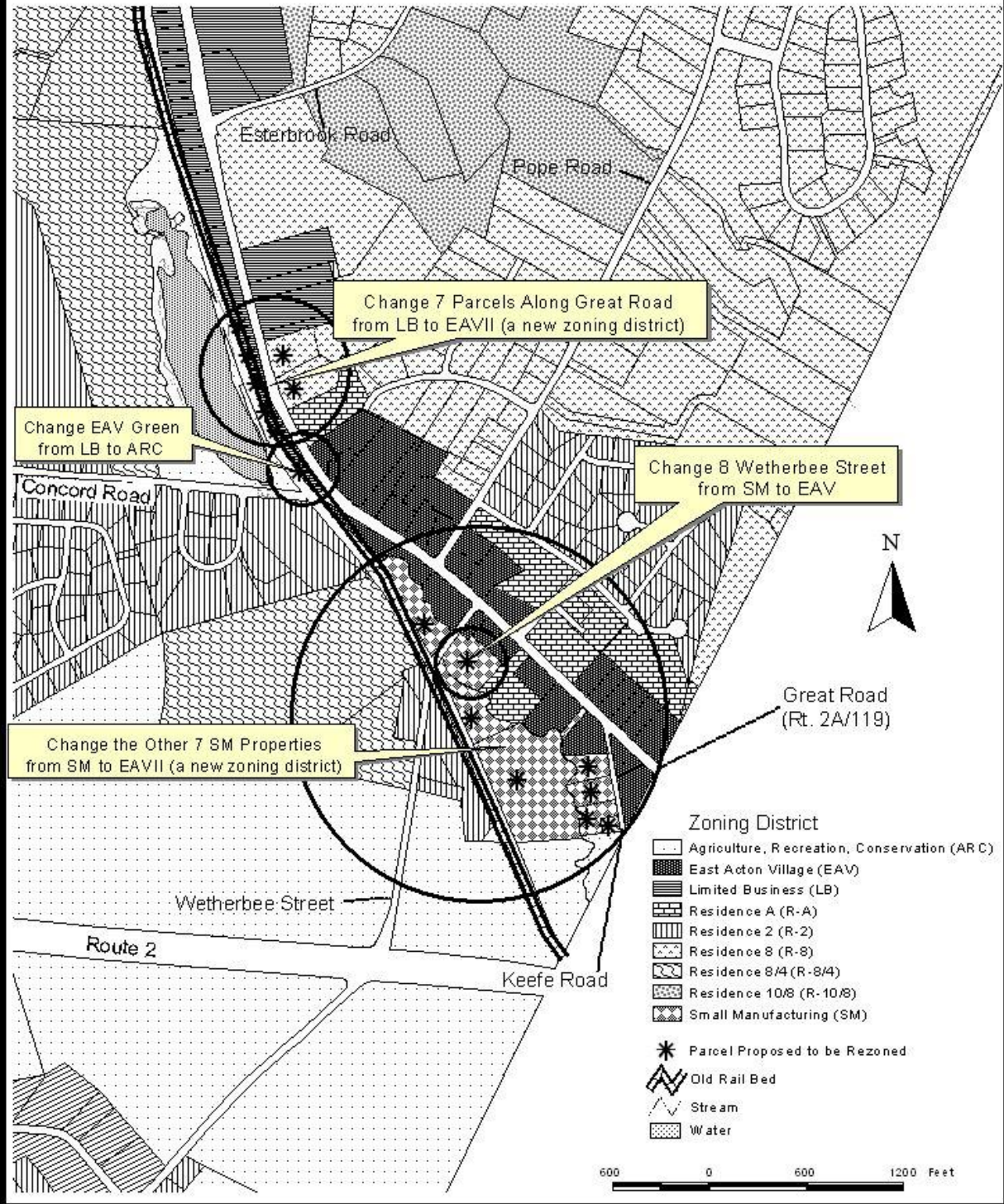
In order to create an environmental and development buffer zone around the East Acton Village District, the EAV Planning Committee recommends rezoning

several parcels: Tax map G4, parcel 10 (126 Great Road) and Tax map F4, parcels 69-1, 104, 69, 67-1, 67, 54 (125, 128, 129 & 133, 132, 134 and 136 Great Road) along the Great Road corridor and Tax map G4, parcel 143 (13 Wetherbee Street) and Tax map G5, parcels 83, 90, 92, 93, 82-1, 82 (13, 19, 21, 25 Keefe Road; 30 & 30A Great Road; and 18 Wetherbee Street) along Keefe Road and between Keefe Road, Great Road and the proposed Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) to a new EAV II Zoning District [See Map 6, page 67]. The allowed uses recommended in the EAV II district are similar to EAV. The recommended minimum front yard and side and rear yard setbacks for the district would be 10 feet (30 feet if a non-residential use abuts a residential zoning district). The recommended minimum lot frontage requirement for the district would be 50 feet. No minimum lot width would be recommended for the EAV II Zoning District. Furthermore, a minimum of 35% open space would be recommended for the district. The recommended allowable Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for the EAV II district would be 0.20 by right, with no provision for increasing the FAR above 0.20. Also, the EAV Planning Committee recommends that EAV II be a Sending District only under the Transfer of Development Rights provision. The EAV II District would discourage development on the Nashoba Brook side of Great Road and direct development more to the northerly side of Great Road for environmental protection by allowing a bonus for transferring development rights from the brook side to the northerly side. The TDR provision would allow those property owners who transfer their development rights to realize the value in their property without developing in an environmentally sensitive area.

Rezoning area: A new zoning district entitled EAV II would be created that would incorporate parcels along Great Road on both sides of the road from Tax map G4, parcel 28 on the north up to but not including Tax map F4, parcel 55 (Toyota dealership) and from the newly zoned ARC lot on the south side of Great Road up through Tax map F4, parcel 54 (Bright Appliance). Also included are the non-EAV zoned lots on the Acton south side of Keefe Road, and the non-EAV lots between EAV zoning and the proposed Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT). See the Table of Principal Uses for allowed uses in this new zone.



DRAFT Proposed Changes to the East Acton Village Zoning District



Map 6.

Goal V4: Encourage the qualities, characteristics, and ambiance of a village center through appropriate development or redevelopment.

- Objective 1:** Ensure that any new buildings, structures, renovations and additions are situated, designed and built at a human scale and in a style that is compatible with existing historical village structures and in harmony with the residential village architecture.
- Objective 2:** In order to discourage “highway strip” development and strip malls, encourage buildings with architectural detail and richness.
- Objective 3:** Enhance and promote a sense of “connectedness” between indoors and outdoors (i.e., the structure and its lot); among multiple structures/lots within the village; and between the village center and its surroundings.
- Objective 4:** Ensure a variety of residential and business opportunities by promoting a mix of land and building uses that enhance the village character.
- Objective 5:** Encourage a diversity of neighborhood-oriented retail and business development and redevelopment.

Issues

All parcels in East Acton Village (EAV) are developed to some degree at this time. Therefore, the process of creating the village character will take time and the redevelopment of many parcels. By providing the “Special Provisions Design Guidelines” and by offering incentives of increased density, the property owners will be encouraged to redevelop their properties according to the village concepts contained in this plan. Also, should any maintenance or expansion occur within village properties, the town should encourage the use of the Guidelines, to the extent possible, at that time as well.

Concentrating development within the village district may put historical structures in jeopardy. With property value high, owners might be tempted to sell to the “highest bidder.” Therefore, historic preservation remains of paramount importance and has been given strong incentives.

Recommendations

The goal of these recommendations is to distinguish East Acton Village aesthetically from the rest of the development along Great Road (Route 2A). By developing according to the design guidelines, property owners and town boards will help bring about the vision that the stakeholders have for this area.

Recommended Strategies for Village Character Goal V4

Objective	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V4.1a *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to create design guidelines for EAV.	High	Special Provisions for EAV	PB, TM	Moderate, 1 day	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V4.1b *	Amend the Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to provide a menu of incentives to developers to encourage the type and location of density that enhances a village ambiance.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Major, ongoing	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V4.2a *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to change dimensions and parking requirements to permit the clustering of separate buildings and separate properties and to reduce curb cuts.	High	Special Provisions for EAV, Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Moderate, ongoing	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V4.2b *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to require both vertical and horizontal variety in large buildings to enhance village aesthetics.	High	Special Provisions for EAV	PB, TM	Moderate, 1 day	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V4.3a	Provide walkways, bike paths, arcaded walks, etc. to connect EAV internally and with the surrounding communities.	High	Special Provisions for EAV. See also Transportation & Infrastructure section	BOS, PB	Major, 4 years, ongoing	Ongoing	Highway, Engineering, Property Owners, Developers
V4.3b	Promote development or redevelopment that encourages walking or the use of bicycles.	High	Special Provisions for EAV	BOS, PB	Moderate, ongoing	Ongoing	BOS, PB

Recommended Strategies for Village Character and Housing Goal V4 (cont'd)

Objective	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V4.4a *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to allow multi-family housing as residential only up to a maximum of four units per building.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 day	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V4.4b *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to provide that apartments in excess of four units be permitted above the ground floor in mixed use developments.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 day	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V4.4c *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to reduce required parking within the EAV Village District to 70% of that presently required.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V4.4d *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to reduce parking required within the EAV Village District to 50% of that presently required if shared parking is used and reduce the parking requirement in the new EAV II district to 70% of that presently required if shared parking is used.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V4.4e *	Amend Zoning Bylaw land use table for the EAV Zoning District to provide for a greater variety of business types and sizes.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V4.5a *	Amend Zoning Bylaw land use table for the EAV Zoning District to provide for a greater variety of business types and sizes.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 month	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V4.5b *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to limit certain business sizes to maintain village scale.		Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Major, 1 day	Spring Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB

Implementation

Transfer of Development Rights

The Transfer of Development Rights, already available in the current Acton Zoning Bylaw, is one tool to aid redevelopment. While this tool has not been used in Acton, it has been successful in other parts of the country.

The EAV Planning Committee strongly urges the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board to review the current Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) provision of the Acton Zoning Bylaw to make the process easier and more understandable. The EAV Planning Committee also urges the BOS to create a board or agency to act as a clearing-house for development rights (such as the Economic Development Committee). Such a clearing-house would facilitate the use of TDR's by providing information to property owners, helping prospective buyers identify potential sellers and possibly serving as a broker of development rights. A member or members of EAVO should be a liaison to the TDR review process and clearing-house agency/board.

Since redevelopment is costly and might include the loss of business during the construction time, the EAV Planning Committee has developed a menu approach to incentives. By Special Permission only, a property owner may exceed a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.20 on his or her property by accepting one or more options from the "menu." In any case, the maximum allowable FAR for any parcel could not exceed 0.50 FAR. Since parking, open space, and waste water management requirements will impact the development potential of any parcel, not all properties may be able to achieve 0.50 FAR. Density is not to be perceived as an end in itself but as a tool to achieve the critical mass required for a vibrant village.

Density options menu

- Special Provisions Design Guidelines for East Acton Village District will provide the vision for the Village.
- All development or redevelopment greater than 500 square feet will require a site plan and will be required to adhere to the Special Provisions Design Guidelines for the new construction only (and the rest of the building at the owner's discretion).
- Development by right will be limited to 0.20 FAR.
- Any increase in FAR over 0.20 requires a Special Permit of the Board of Selectmen (BOS) up to a maximum of 0.50 through the following means:
 - TDR's will allow an additional 0.20 FAR. However, development rights purchased from the Nashoba Brook side of Great Road within either EAV or EAV II [see map 6 page 67] will receive an additional 25% bonus on square footage transferred. (e.g., should a developer wish to obtain 1,250 square feet he/she would be able to do so by buying 1,000

square feet from a brook side property and receive the remaining 250 square feet as a bonus or he could purchase the 1,250 square feet from a non-brook side sending property and pay for 1,250 square feet).

- With historical preservation as defined by the Acton Historical Commission [see Appendix], an additional 0.1 FAR will be allowed. Any developer or property owner who tears down an historical structure will be denied additional FAR. That property will be limited to a FAR of 0.20 maximum.
- Affordable housing on the upper floors of mixed use new development or redevelopment only (at least 1 unit, 10% of the total number of units, or such higher number determined by the Board of Selectmen during the permitting process) would be allowed an additional 0.1 FAR.
- With LEED certification an additional .05 FAR is allowed (see the Environment Chapter for a description of the LEED program).

Dimensional Requirements

At the turn of the twentieth century buildings were close to the road to allow easy access to homes and businesses. The buildings that were used for businesses were often family homes as well. Parking, when cars were available, was easily accommodated on the street due to the limited number of motor vehicles. Architecture was varied according to use and finances. Large buildings were used for taverns with rooms to rent above and the owner's family living behind; mills were close to the road with family homes nearby; and village residences both large and small were all part of the landscape.

To recreate a similar landscape the EAV Planning Committee recommends changing the minimum required setback in the Zoning Bylaw so that buildings in EAV can be situated up to 10 feet from the right-of-way ("front yard setback") and 5 feet from side and rear lot lines. It is also recommended that the minimum lot frontage and lot width requirements in the Zoning Bylaw be removed for the EAV Zoning District. Sidewalks must be available for pedestrians along with benches and pocket parks as amenities. Within the same parcel, buildings may be situated close together for the convenience of pedestrian shoppers. Off-street parking should be located to the rear or side of the buildings. On large parcels where buildings could be located in several areas, developers are encouraged to locate parking and green spaces in the center of the development, similar to a quadrangle. Again, buildings would be both close to the street and at the rear of the property with other amenities in between or on the side.

Lighting

While, all properties must adhere to the Acton Outdoor Lighting Regulations in order to enhance the character of the village district, gooseneck lights will be permitted within the East Acton Village zoning district.

Goal V5: Promote diverse residential development in East Acton Village and the surrounding area.

Objective 1: Encourage apartments above retail stores, offices, and other permitted uses.

Objective 2: Encourage a mixture of housing opportunities including affordable, low and moderate income in the village and within walking distance of the village.

Description of Existing Housing in East Acton

Apartment Complexes

All three complexes are zoned Multifamily (R-A) and are located on Great Road. Zoning would not allow additional units to be constructed at these sites.

1. Azalea Court Apartments, located on tax map G5, parcel 72-3 (6 and 8 Azalea Court). These two buildings are condominiums, but they are mostly rented to apartment dwellers. There are no other properties located on Azalea Court.
2. Iris Court Apartments, located on tax map G5, parcels 63, 72, and 72-4 (1, 2, 3, 5, and 14 Iris Court). These five buildings are rentals. There are no other properties located on Iris Court.
3. Pillar House Apartments, located on tax map G5, parcel 76-1 (48 Great Road). This is a single building containing condominiums with its own driveway onto Great Road.

Smaller Apartment Buildings

There are a few smaller buildings, all located along Great Road within the East Acton Village District, which contain multiple apartment units. These include buildings such as:

- *56 Great Road: a four-unit rental building with indoor garages at the southwest corner of Wetherbee Street and Great Road. This building contains rentals but has been converted to condominiums, which are for sale as such. The original building is on the Cultural Resource List.
- *60 Great Road: at the northwest corner of Wetherbee Street and Great Road. This historic tavern contains three rental apartments on the second floor and office/retail on the ground floor. This building is also on the Cultural Resource List.
- *52 and 54 Great Road: these two older buildings contain some rented rooms and some rented apartments. #52 is on the Cultural Resource List.

*65 Great Road: this historic tavern and stage stop has two rental apartments on the second floor and Phillips Glass and a photography studio on the ground floor. This building is on the Cultural Resource List.

Other Residential Buildings on Great Road and Keefe Road

There are several individual homes either owner-occupied or rented along Great Road. Some of these may contain more than one rental unit, such as 38 Great Road (between the Mobil and Ginger Court) which is on the Cultural Resource List. There are some owner-occupied homes on Keefe Road.

Pope Road

The area behind the Iris Court/Azalea Court apartments (Myrtle, Bayberry, Magnolia, Phlox, Rose) is zoned Single Family (R-2), 20,000 square foot lots. The remainder of Pope Road is zoned Single Family (R-8), 80,000 square feet. There appears to be very little of this area that has not been developed.

Concord Road

This area is zoned Single Family (R-2), 20,000 square feet. There appears to be little land left for development.

Wetherbee Street

1. West Side:

- *21 and 39 Wetherbee), which are in the R-2 zoning district (20,000 square feet).
- * Parcel 189 contains 5 1/3 acres of open land with frontage on Wetherbee Street and is zoned R-8/4 (80,000 square feet).
- * Parcel 174 contains 27 3/4 acre, zoned R-8/4, showing no frontage on Wetherbee Street, but lengthy frontage on the railroad right of way. It is behind and adjacent to Parcel 189 above. Both Parcel 189 and Parcel 174 are within Subdistrict B of the Affordable Housing Overlay District.

2. East Side. This side of the street is zoned R-2 from the railroad right-of-way to the State-owned land (50 Massachusetts Ave.).

- * There a couple of homes (36 and 40 Wetherbee Street) on small lots all of which are on the Cultural Resource List.
- * Tax map G4, parcel 208 contains an industrial building on a 3 1/3 acre plot with extensive frontage on the railroad right of way. This parcel is also within Subdistrict B of the Affordable Housing Overlay District.

Issues

Several vintage buildings, primarily from the nineteenth century, remain in use in East Acton both as homes and commercial properties. Preservation of these historic structures will serve the essential function of providing the New England character and ambiance of the village. New England villages typically had apartments located on the second and third floors of buildings and retail or offices on the first floor. In the East Acton Village zoning district, there are several examples of this arrangement. Examples of this configuration in the East Acton Village zoning district include the building at 60 Great Road (the old Nashoba Tavern) which contains two offices and a store on the first floor and apartments on the second floor. The building at 65 Great Road (the old Wetherbee Tavern) now houses Phillips Glass and a photography studio on the first floor and apartments above. In keeping with this village character, large apartment buildings are not acceptable while smaller apartment buildings (4 units or less), and above business apartments would fulfill the need for housing. Furthermore, it is inconsistent with village character, and therefore undesirable, to demolish or radically alter historic structures in order to generate large apartment complexes.

Residential support is vital to a vibrant village. Sufficient pedestrian traffic is a requirement for viable community based businesses. This is why housing above stores and businesses is important for the area as well as pedestrian walkways and sidewalks. At the same time, having people living in the village 24 hours a day 7 days a week provides some security for the local businesses and other residents.

Recommendations and Implementation

In order to preserve the remaining historical homes in EAV and to encourage a return to a village ambiance, the EAV Planning Committee has recommended amending the zoning bylaw to provide more allowable uses that would accommodate these older homes and structures. By providing for apartments above retail without requiring owner occupancy and allowing for two-family homes and conversions to two to four-family homes, economic incentives are provided to maintain and improve these houses currently listed on the Acton Historical Cultural List. These changes will also encourage more residents in East Acton Village which will provide more customers and overnight and weekend traffic for business security, and add more life and activity to the village. The need for affordable housing is addressed by providing incentives to business/property owners in the district to add FAR for developing housing on the upper floor of office/retail buildings in the village with a minimum of 10% set aside for low-income residents. Also, the conversion of two family homes should be allowed as a right provided historical buildings are maintained as such. The building inspector will assure compliance when issuing the building permit.

Recommended Strategies for Village Character Goal V5

Strategy Number	Strategy	Priority	Appendix Reference	Approval Required	Amount of Effort	Desired Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible
V5.1a *	Amend the Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to provide that residential apartments in excess of four units be permitted above the ground floor only in mixed use developments.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 day	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V5.1b *	Amend the Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to provide a menu of incentives to developers to encourage the type and location of density that enhances a village ambiance.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Major, ongoing	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V5.2a *	Amend the Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to allow multi-family housing up to a maximum of four units per building.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 day	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V5.2b *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to allow two family houses by right in EAV.	High	Zoning Bylaw changes	PB, TM	Minor, 1 day	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB
V5.2c *	Amend Zoning Bylaw for the EAV Zoning District to provide incentives to preserve historical homes by providing FAR bonuses.	Medium	Zoning Bylaw changes. See also the Density Options Menu in Goal 3 of this chapter	PB, TM	Major, 1 day	Spring 2004	EAVPC, PB

